

# Gaps in coaching pay reveal teaching pay quagmire in the two Carolinas

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County has talked about in the past and has not done is coaching contracts,” said Roehner. “I think as long as a coach is not bound to remain at a school as a coach then how do you keep hold of him? Gordon did not sign a coaching contract, nobody signs coaching contracts.”

All coaches in Brunswick County, and throughout the rest of North Carolina, sign teaching contracts that have no specific duration or length intended.

“If you want to go to South Carolina and coach, nothing’s holding you back but your teaching contract,” explained Roehner. If North Carolina could create contracts that explicitly denote a length of time the coach would be obligated to stay at a school, it would increase the ability of schools to ward off unwanted suitors. But according to Roehner that seems unlikely to happen.

### To pay or not to pay...more?

Does North Carolina need to increase the wages for high school coaches, or are South Carolina’s salaries out of touch with educational priorities?

The answer is not entirely clear, especially for those with lengthy involvement in the profession, such as Socastee (S.C.) High School athletic director Roger Dixon. Dixon spent 35 years as an athletic director and coach in North Carolina, with the bulk of that time being spent at Gastonia Ashbrook, Charlotte Vance and Charlotte Christian.

“When I coached, I would have liked to have made more money than I was getting. I came through when I was getting \$750 to coach (for) just as long as these guys are coaching and getting \$7,000 or \$100,000 for,” said Dixon about supplements and salaries in S.C. “Part of me says, ‘I should have received more compensation for the duties.’ But I do think that because of the college level and what some of those guys have gotten, it’s kind of like the housing market; it got too far above the level it should be at. I think there’s a happy medium in there.”

Dixon added, “Now I’m an old school guy though. I think you should be justly compensated for the duties you perform, so I do think the North Carolina schools are probably lesser paid than what they should be. But on the other hand, I don’t think that a high school football coach ought to make \$80,000 to \$100,000 and then you got some other guy who’s putting in just as much time making \$40,000. It’s not equitable in some cases.”

### Brunswick supplements

Even though Brunswick County struggles to compete against school districts in South Carolina, the Brunswick County school board has put forward supplements that rank among the highest offered in North Carolina, including amounts that exceed nearby counties such as Robeson, Cumberland, Duplin, Lenoir and New Hanover, which pays a flat rate like Mecklenburg County.

“Our supplements are very competitive with schools in North Carolina and our board does a very good job in supporting our athletic program,” said South Brunswick principal Vann Pennell.

Brunswick County pay supplements are based on coaching experience and also contain additional percentages available for every round in the playoffs that a team reaches. Leading South to the third round of the state playoffs this year, Walters earned an additional 10 percent of his supplement each week his team was involved in postseason play.

### Some NC systems do pay nicely

Brunswick’s supplements compare well with many counties in North Carolina, but there are a few school systems in the state that are able to match the supplements, though not necessarily the salaries, offered in South Carolina districts.

Durham Public Schools for example, offers head football coaching supplements of up to \$8,318 per season based on experience. Haywood County in western North Carolina lists its supplements for head football coaches as negotiable, but candidates are eligible for up to \$7,300 depending on their coaching experience. Guilford, Cabarrus, Cleveland and Buncombe counties are all able to offer supplements that can top \$5,000 dependent upon the coach’s experience.

But even as supplements vary from county to county, the overall salaries of head football coaches don’t differ much in North Carolina because they are all paid based on their teaching salaries. It’s that factor that prevents North Carolina from having as wide a range of salaries.

### Brunswick and Lexington head-to-head

It’s hard to determine whether Brunswick’s supplement measures up head-to-head with the Lexington One School District, Walters’ next destination. The comparison is unclear because the supplement for head football coaches is not listed in Lexington One’s Athletics Salary and Supplements Information sheet. It simply says, “As negotiated.”

“Typically the principal of the school is involved with that. It’s primarily negotiated primarily between the principal and the head coach but the superintendent is kept abreast of everything in those negotiations,” said White Knoll athletic director Bryan Butz. “The principal would not have the ability to say, ‘Yes, we’re going to pay you that,’ without prior approval from the superintendent.”

Pay in Lexington One is based on the teaching salary scale. But Butz clarified the “as negotiated” part of the supplement sheet.

“I think that’s there in case somebody comes in that maybe hasn’t been teaching all that long but has a lot of experience coaching. So there’s some wiggle room.”

Wiggle room is not something that would be available in negotiations with most North Carolina school systems. Additionally, a quick glance at the assistant coaching supplements indicates the disparity between Brunswick and Lexington. Head coaching supplements in Brunswick County begin at \$2,900 per season. Lexington One also has supplements starting out in that range, but

those figures are for junior varsity assistant football coaches.

Additionally, coaches in Lexington One who are offensive or defensive coordinators draw a flat rate \$1,000 supplement tacked on to their normal assistant coaching supplement.

### Postseason earnings

Head football coaches in Brunswick County can boast to their North Carolina peers about the playoff add-ons they can potentially make. But coaches in the Lexington One district who make

the playoffs can really pile some cash onto their annual earnings.

Head coaches are paid \$250 for making the first round, \$500 for the second, \$750 for the third and \$1,000 for the fourth round. State championships translate into an automatic \$1,000 bonus. Assistant coaches also benefit, making \$150, \$300, \$450 and \$600 for participation in the first four rounds.

Basketball provides a clearer difference between the

two districts. Hoops coaches in Brunswick top out at \$3,310, while also being eligible for the postseason supplement percentages. But Lexington One is able to offer its coaches up to \$6,000, a steep advantage for the South Carolina school district.

It’s true that Brunswick does not measure up to South Carolina’s salaries or supplements in most cases. But some of South Carolina’s districts fail to measure up even against other districts in their own state.

### Not all SC coaches are equitably paid

It’s not true that all South Carolina coaches are well paid. A quick check of a salary database compiled by Myrtle Beach Sun News and The State (Columbia, S.C.) newspapers shows that some Palmetto State skippers make pocket change compared to their cohorts. Bamberg-Erhardt’s Kevin Crosby was listed as being paid \$26,150, the lowest salary in the state for a coach who also taught at his school.

Granted, 2008 was Crosby’s first year as a head coach, a fact that affected his salary, but he still led his team to a 9-4 record and the third round of the playoffs. In contrast, Bill Kimrey’s Dutch Fork team finished 2-9 last season. Kimrey is South Carolina’s highest paid football coach at \$104,141 per year. Accordingly, 2008 added up to \$57,000 per victory for Kimrey, simple arithmetic at which Crosby, a math teacher at Bamberg-Erhardt, would probably bristle.

And though Kimrey ranks at the top of the coaching pay scale in South Carolina, Summerville High School’s head football coach and athletic director John McKissick doesn’t even rank in the state’s top 10, despite being one of the most successful coaches in American high school football history.

McKissick makes \$86,000, a nice paycheck for certain. But having won the most state championships in state history (10, tied for first), and the most games all-time (486), one might think he should be paid even more considering the state’s respect for its football coaches.

McKissick, who’s coached high school football in South Carolina for 50 years, certainly would be worthy of being one of the top paid, considering his success both on and off the field. In 2003 he received the American Football Coaches Association “Power of Influence” Award, an honor that measures a coach’s contributions outside of the football stadium.

### Measuring coaches’ contributions

McKissick is a gleaming example that a coach’s wages should not be limited to the results on the field. South Brunswick principal Vann Pennell notes that basing pay on results brings about a slippery slope, one slanted toward producing wins regardless of the cost.

“What I look at first, if you’ve got a man who’s got credibility, morals and values and is going to treat his kids well, make sure academics are the top priority, and does his very best to get the kids placed in college – then I think that speaks well of him,” said Pennell. “If you take care of the details, winning will take care of itself. But just to say, ‘We’re going to pay you based on winning and losing,’ is way out of kilter.”

### The Walters’ effect

Sometimes a coach’s effectiveness is about more than simple wins and losses. Walters’ tenure at South Brunswick illustrates this point.

Fans, parents and supporters of schools like South Brunswick will simply have to content themselves with the present, knowing that at any point a school in a wealthier Palmetto State district could swoop in and snatch their football coach away, with little more than a fatter pay check being the carrot. All the Cougar faithful will be left with are the wise words of Mac Dre: Don’t hate the player, hate the game...

“Gordon did an awesome job, a tremendous job. Not just football, but to be able to see the big picture,” said Pennell. “He’s helped out our whole athletic program. He helped us unify the coaches. He’s helped us bring some community and some fellowship to the coaching staff here. And that moves directly over to other sports and to the hallways. That’s a great reflection on academics which is the reason why we’re here.”

Proponents of increasing coaching pay point out that some athletes wouldn’t be attending school regularly were it not for sports. And often it’s the coaches who provide a father figure or guidance to students who might otherwise be chalked up as lost causes. Those actions, such as picking kids up from home, dropping them off or buying them dinner, are often invisible to fans and don’t neatly fall into a statewide pay scale or a win-loss ledger.

### NC teaching pay

North Carolina’s teaching pay isn’t great. Despite ranking 11th in the country for number of teachers – 97,676 – North Carolina ranks only 25th in teacher pay, averaging \$47,354 per instructor. The national average checks in at \$52,308.

Still, North Carolina’s average salary rose 6.9 percent in the last 10 years, the eighth largest jump in the United States, according to the National Education Association’s (NEA) 2007-08 statistics. So despite lagging behind other states in the 20th century, North Carolina is improving in teacher pay.

Sustaining this progress is imperative as North Carolina continues to attract transplants from around the country seeking warmer climes, southern living and, until recently, employment opportunities. Indicative of this trend, the number of North Carolina high school graduates rose 48 percent from 1998 to 2008 as more children pile into the state’s schools.

Based on projections from the U.S. Census Bureau, the state’s growth rate from 1995-2025 will be the seventh highest in the nation, and will bring more than 2.2 million new folks to the state. It’s safe to assume some of those new people will be school-aged.

### The conundrum

This leads the debate back to where it started: should North Carolina increase its pay or should South Carolina close the gaping difference between its high and low salaries? Changing anything pay-related in South Carolina would be nigh impossible considering the deregulated structure of the state’s school system.

For Pennell the solution is simple. “To me it’s the most important job in the world besides parenting,” said the reigning Brunswick County Principal of the Year. “We’re developing those kids to take over the world eventually so I think everybody in education deserves more than they’re getting because that’s the only way we’re going to be able to keep good people.”

But to keep up with the increase in students, the state will have to be able to hire and retain more teachers and good coaches, and compensation is an important part in achieving that goal.

Unfortunately, the current economic situation won’t allow for raising teacher pay, especially with budget cuts looming over the heads of school boards across North Carolina. Additionally, the state is considering raising class sizes instead of hiring more teachers. Now may not be the most appropriate time to worry about paying coaches more money.

It appears North Carolina will do nothing in the near future regarding this dilemma. The state will continue to lose some teachers and coaches to its southern neighbor, especially as South Carolina rapidly mends a tattered education tradition and certain Palmetto districts take advantage of their fiscal might.

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## Golf team continues to roll in league play

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while South Columbus carded a collective 398 score. Pender, Heide Trask and East Columbus all had 433 strokes, with East Columbus’ score significantly improved by a Pete Peterson ace on the 17th hole.

Peterson hit a shot with his five-iron directly into the par-3 17th hole cup from 182 yards.

But there was no denying South another league win despite Peterson’s miracle shot. Richard Weinacht, playing on his home course, carded an 80, while promising freshman Adam Franklin rebounded from a 92 in his last round to finish with

an 83.

Senior Bradley Narron shot an 84, and freshman Jason Stancil added a 91, not even a week after shooting a 79.

The Cougs’ victory followed another win last Monday at Whiteville Country Club. South shot a 310, beating second placed Whiteville by 37 strokes for the win. Gore was co-medalist with Weinacht; both shot 74 on an often unfriendly course. Stancil shot 79, the best outing of his ninth grade season, and Mitch Brendle carded an 83. Narron pitched in an 85 as South stayed unbeaten in conference play.



## Basnight commits to UNC-Wilmington

Brunswick Community College shooting guard Jeremy Basnight committed last weekend to play basketball at UNC-Wilmington next season. The 6-foot-5 sophomore averaged 10.2 points per game and is a welcome addition to a Seahawks roster recently depleted by two players’ decisions to transfer to new schools. Basnight, a native of Moyock, N.C., and a product of Currituck High School, will provide UNCW coach Benny Moss with athleticism and a streaky southpaw shooter who can put up devastating offensive numbers when he’s in a zone.

File photo by Jim Harper